

SECRET LOVE.

By ELLEN ASHTON.

"Make room—give her air—has any one salts?" were the cries that rang through the crowded ball room, startling the careless lookers on, and even arresting the dancers. The music stopped, and a rush was made toward one of the windows.

"Who has fainted?" asked my aunt.

"I don't know," replied a passer by.

"I believe it is Miss Henley," said a third, hastening forward with a glass of water.

"Miss Henley," replied my aunt, turning to me, "then I know it all. Poor, poor girl!"

"What do you mean," said I.

"Come hither into the balcony, where we will be unobserved, and I will tell you."

We stepped out into the night. Calmly and beautifully the moon was sailing on high, silvering the garden trees around, and flinging her mystic beams in patches along the gravel walk; while a light wind, ruffling the leaves pleasantly, and fanning my forehead with its cool breath, wantoned around. The contrast with the glare and bustle within was striking. We lingered a few minutes on the portico, but one or two persons approaching, we descended into the garden, and it was while walking to and fro in one of the paths, that my aunt related the following story.

"Amy Henley is one of the meekest of her sex, and four years ago, when she was just eighteen, few could vie with her in amiability or accomplishments. Nor is she without personal attractions, though these alone, perhaps, would never have distinguished her above the crowd. She has but one defect—she is somewhat lame. The deformity which produces this is, however, so slight that it is never betrayed except when she walks. But, if she is unfortunate in this respect, her richly stored mind and her fine imagination amply compensate for it. Indeed none can converse long with Amy Henley without being fascinated, and perhaps few girls have had more suitors, many of them such as any woman could be happy with. But it has been Amy's misfortune to form a secret attachment which has long controlled her heart, and which, I grieve to say, has ended in disappointment. But let me go back to the time when Amy was scarcely seventeen, and when no sorrow had ever dimmed her beautiful brow.

"The residence of her parents at that time was in the country, at a spacious and elegant mansion on the banks of the Susquehanna. They had but two children, Amy and her brother Henry, now the lawyer, whom you have met. At that time he had not finished his collegiate course, and, like all undergraduates, had a bosom friend, with whom you also have a slight acquaintance, Albert Morford. As Henry always spent the vacations at home, and as Morford was an orphan, and had no friends to go to, an invitation was given him to accompany Henry to Henley Hall, and accordingly he came. You know that he is generally admired by our sex, is talented, and has peculiarly winning manners. He soon fascinated the whole household, even to the servants, and with the old folks he was indispensable. A few generous acts of charity, springing from a feeling heart, had recommended him to the mother; and his daring in field sports, for which Mr. Henley entertained a passion, established him in the heart of the father. Then he was always affable and kind, ever ready to yield his own pleasures to those of others, in short the very person to visit at a country seat in a somewhat secluded district. Nothing could be done without him. His advice was asked on every occasion, and,

when he concluded his visit, his praises were trumpeted daily by the family until his return at the ensuing vacation. And for a while even Amy was as fervent, if not as loud, as any.

"The second visit of Morford established him, if possible, in greater favor than his first. He hunted with the father—he conversed respectfully with the mother—he was obliging to all the servants, but especially to the housekeeper—and he was always, when disengaged from the others, at the service of Amy, to read to her, ride with her, or attend her in her errands of charity around the neighborhood. Yet these attentions were always characterized by a frankness which precluded the idea that he was in love with her, though at length Amy, ignorant of the world, and endowed with a too susceptible heart, began to think otherwise. Poor girl! she had seen little of human nature, except as it existed in her own family, and she fondly dreamed that was a representative of the great world without.

"Tell me not that men are as you describe them," she said one day to Morford, when he had been picturing man as he exists in our own cities, "for if you speak the truth—if there is so much hollow-heartedness, deceit, and wrong in this world, I wish not to live

"To a girl of such sentiments—so romantic and susceptible—Albert Morford was a dangerous companion. Not that he would knowingly have trepanned her affections from her, for his was a nature incapable of such baseness, but then his constant attentions to her—and she was at that age when attentions alone are almost irresistible—united to his eloquence, his manly beauty, his finished manners, and the reputation he enjoyed for talent, gradually established an interest in her heart, even before she was aware of it. Day and night she thought of him, all unconscious to herself, for as yet she knew not what love was, and innocently regarded it as the most natural thing in the world that she should think of her brother's bosom friend. It was not until the second year of Morford's visits that she even knew she loved him, and then, the delay of his arrival for a week coupled with the knowledge that he had gone to the Springs with a distant cousin, who was said to

be extremely beautiful, first aroused her to the state of her heart, by filling her with a strange uneasiness, which often subdued her to tears, and which at length she knew to be jealousy, that sure symptom of the presence of love—though, by the bye, love often exists without it. From this hour the unhappiness of Amy began. Hitherto she had never known sorrow, but life had been to her a beautiful dream. Now all was changed. Once aware of her love for Morford, she was tormented by continual doubts whether that affection was returned. At times she would imagine that he loved her, and then again she feared that he did not. Oh! how she watched his every movement—how she listened to catch the tone in which he spoke—how she looked for his return at dinner or supper when he had gone out with her father, brother or others. But still his demeanor was a puzzle to her, for unsophisticated as she was she could not perceive that his attentions were only those of a near friend, and thus, exhilarated by one thing today and depressed by another tomorrow, she lived on, loving deeper and deeper every hour of her existence. Often a word casually dropped by Morford, and to which he attached no meaning, would afford her food for delicious thought for hours; and then another word, uttered with as little thought, would cause her a sleepless night and a pillow wet with tears. Our sex is not understood by the other, for how much would they prize our love if they knew the agony of heart we suffer at times, even when the passion is reciprocated. A light word or passing jest, forgot by a suitor as soon as uttered, has wrung many a maiden's heart with torture for hours, nay days and weeks, until explained. But I wander from my story.

"Could Amy have read Morford's heart—and had she been more acquainted with the world or with his sex, she could have read it—she would have seen that he did not love her. Yet he admired and esteemed her —admired her for her talents, and esteemed her for her amiability. Had it not been for that unlucky lameness he might even have loved her; but Morford was quite as romantic, in his way, as Amy, and having formed to himself a beau ideal of a wife, in which personal beauty, or at least an absence of deformity was regarded as essential, he was protected from the arrows of the god, so far as Miss

Henley was concerned. It never entered into his thoughts that Amy could love him, simply because he never thought of loving her, and he had none of that despicable vanity which is ever alive to one's own charms, and imagining that others are equally so. Thus days glided into weeks, and weeks became months, and Morford and Amy still continued in this dangerous proximity—the one pleased with the good sense, accomplishments and virtues of the other, and thinking how dull Henley Hall would be without such an inmate; the other lavishing her whole soul on her visitor, dreaming of him by night and musing on him by day, with an adoration of which only a first love, and that love secretly indulged, is capable. Growing with her youth, and strengthening with her strength, the passion of Amy for Morford soon came to form a part of her being—to be so inextricably interwoven with her every thought that their separation would be death. Alas! for her.

"Thus time passed. Again and again they met and parted, and still Morford was ignorant with what devotion he was regarded by Amy. At length an incident happened to open her eyes.

"During one of his visits to Henley Hall, a ball was given in the neighboring country town, and, as it was to be a festive occasion of unusual splendor, it was resolved that the whole family should go. Amy never looked better, nor was in better spirits, than during the ride there, and for some time after she entered the room. It is true, her infirmity prevented her from dancing, but she loved to gaze on others engaged in this graceful pastime, and her accomplishments and conversational talents soon drew around her a little circle of admirers. It was now that Morford, who had been her attendant thus far, stole from her side, for he had noticed in another part of the room a lady of extraordinary beauty, who had been known to him by sight a long time, and to whom a mutual friend had promised him an introduction. They were now presented to each other, and Morford soon found that all he had heard of her wit, eloquence and accomplishments had not exaggerated them. He was soon completely fascinated by his new companion. They talked together, they promenaded together, and

they danced together, and it was not long before he forgot even that Amy was in the room. He was soon, however, recalled to the fact. Amy had followed him with her eyes on his retirement from her circle, and all at once it was noticed that her spirits deserted her. This was when Morford was presented to Miss Wevill. His interest in her soon became apparent to the keenly sensitive heart of Amy, and she watched their movements with feelings that no words could describe. Her cheek now deadly pale and now flushed with crimson, would have revealed her secret to any keen observer, who had known the circumstances of her intimacy with Morford. But none such were there. She made several efforts to control her emotions, but all in vain. She saw that Morford loved her not, for there was a devotion in his every look when speaking to his companion, which he had never shown to her. At length her physical nature could understand her agonized emotions no longer, and when he and Miss Wevill swept by in the dance, both so deeply occupied with each other that Morford seemed to have forgotten where Amy sat and passed her without a look, she could endure it no longer, but placing her hands on her heart, rose to leave the room. Before, however, she had advanced many steps, a deathly sickness came over her, and she fell fainting to the ground. A general cry of alarm broke from the spectators, and then Morford's attention was attracted to the insensible girl. He ran to her, and was among the most active in restoring her; but when she opened her eyes, and saw who it was that stood by her, she turned away with a shudder. On her retiring he would have accompanied her to the carriage, but she shrunk from him with undisguised aversion. Her mother now, for the first time, understood her daughter's heart, for what woman could shut her eyes to these symptoms? Morford too saw all.

"I have but little more to add. Morford did not return to the Hall that evening, and on the ensuing day left that portion of the country. He had no heart to bestow on Amy, even if he could have loved her, which estimable as she was, he could not; for, alas! love is a thing we cannot control, and makes slaves of us all. But it was a year before he renewed his acquaintance with Miss Wevill, so shocked had he been

by the result of that evening's devotion to her. Nearly another year elapsed before their marriage, which, you know, occurred about a month ago.

"And since that fatal evening Amy has pined away. Change of scene has failed to bring the sunshine back to her heart or the smile to her eye. She has been, with her parents, to Niagara, and is now on her return home. It is most unfortunate that our fair hostess was ignorant of her story, else she never would have invited her and Mr. Morford here on the same evening. I have no doubt that this unexpected meeting with him and his bride has proved too much for the acute feelings of Amy—but let us go in again, and I will find an opportunity to enquire."

It was as my aunt said.

A few words, and this sad story is closed forever. Amy never looked up again. The marriage of Morford had been kept a secret from her, and this startling annunciation of the fact proved too much for a frame already wasted with sorrow, and a heart long since buried to this world. She went home, and as fall drew on, an alarming cough made its appearance, the sure premonition of consumption. The snows of December fell on her grave.

THE LADY'S WORLD OF FASHION. 1842.